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WHEN THIRD SPACES BECOME THERAPEUTIC: THE VALUE OF COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING IN TERTIARY CARE CANCER

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There is a side to suffering that is surprisingly resilient during times of extreme adversity.

Within the context of patient-centred care, “third spaces” are public spaces that exist in-between the home and work environments that allow people to gather informally to offer support, empathy and learn from each other. With the current movement towards whole person care, patients have become increasingly vocal about the need for and the value of physical “third spaces” within tertiary clinical settings that provide opportunity to just be, to share, to give or to receive support.

Patients who participate in meaning making workshops, yoga, creative arts therapies, or mindfulness sessions have reported the benefits of experiencing a safe place to explore difficult emotions, discover connections, and confront existential questions.

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The MUHC Cedars CanSupport is a vital non-profit program at the McGill University Health Centre under the Cancer Care Mission's Supportive and Palliative Care Division. A variety of complementary therapies are offered individually or in groups/workshops to cancer patients and their families as adjuvant therapies to conventional cancer treatments. These therapies aim to increase self-awareness and self-expression, and to reignite agency during times of suffering.

This presentation will include testimonials to describe the unique and beneficial experiences patients have derived from complementary therapies. The perspectives of healthcare providers, who are simultaneously facilitators, participants, and witnesses to the search for meaning, will also be explored. Taken together, these narratives can lead to further insight and innovative practices to facilitate the transformational potential for growth during deep suffering.■